



State of Connecticut
SENATOR DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.
Twenty-ninth District
President Pro Tempore

Testimony of Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.

Before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
March 11, 2014

**In Support of SB 400, *An Act Concerning Connecticut's
Manufacturing and Technology Workforce*,
HB 5495, *An Act Establishing an Accelerated Certificates Program* and
HB 5497 *An Act Implementing an I-BEST Program Throughout the
Connecticut State University System***

Senator Cassano, Representative Willis and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for raising **SB 400, *An Act Concerning Connecticut's Manufacturing and Technology Workforce*; HB 5495, *An Act Establishing an Accelerated Certificates Program*; and HB 5497 *An Act Implementing an I-BEST Program Throughout the Connecticut State University System*.**

These three bills, as well as several others being heard today, seek to address the employment and training needs of the state's employers and workforce. Too many of Connecticut's residents are still struggling to find employment. At the same time, our employers report difficulty in meeting their workforce needs, particularly for employees with the right skills and training. The three bills I am highlighting today each target the education and training needs of different populations of job-seekers to provide a broad array of opportunities and pathways for career advancement.

HB 5497 targets a particularly hard to serve population of unemployed individuals, usually with multiple barriers to employment. Specifically, the bill addresses the complex needs of participants in the Jobs First Employment Services program who lack both basic literacy and math skills and necessary real-world job skills to be successful in the workforce. The bill implements an Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model program throughout the Connecticut State University System (CSUS). This model builds upon a successful pilot at Eastern Connecticut State University and is similar in concept to a program currently operating in Washington State. The I-BEST model integrates basic education with real world job training to enable students to move more quickly into living wage employment.



HB 5495 similarly targets a population of unemployed individuals with multiple barriers to employment, including those lacking basic literacy and math skills. The proposal would require the Board of Regents, Department of Education and regional work force boards to develop a program where adult learners may obtain a post-secondary certificate on an accelerated schedule of not more than twelve months. The accelerated program would include basic education courses and would be offered throughout the state, including at community colleges, vocational-technical schools and adult education programs.

Finally, SB 400 targets post-secondary students pursuing certificates in advanced manufacturing or other technology-related industries at community colleges. The bill would allow such students to take courses toward the certificate while simultaneously working in a related occupational field to learn the trade.

Each of these bills seeks to address the needs of both employers and job-seekers, particularly those lacking basic education skills, by moving adult learners more quickly into higher wage career pathways. Thank you for the commitment your committee has shown this session to exploring creative solutions for the state's long term unemployed and to building a highly skilled and educated workforce.